



AM I FREE TO CHOOSE

MY NEXT

TEACHER?

Compilation of teachings
by Ven Wei Wu



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A Brief Introduction of Than Hsiang

A group of young adults with wholesome roots lead by Brother Neoh Kah Thong established the Bayan Baru Buddhist Association (later renamed the Than Hsiang Buddhist Welfare Association) in 1985. Its activities flourished rapidly. The current site in the southwest part of Penang where Than Hsiang Temple stands was purchased from the Penang Development Corporation with the assistance of the former Penang Chief Minister, Tun Dr. Lim Chong Eu. The magnificent Than Hsiang Temple was built in 1991.

Than Hsiang Foundation

In conjunction with the establishment of the Than Hsiang Temple, the Than Hsiang Foundation was established in January 1990, kickstarting a series of construction and activities. In 1992, Brother Neoh ordained as a monk and devoted himself to the development of Buddhism. After his ordination, he was known as Venerable Wei Wu. He then established Than Hsiang Branches in Kuala Lumpur, Negeri Sembilan, Kedah, Perak and Thailand.



Education

In 1992, Than Hsiang Buddhist Research Centre affiliated with the Buddhist University of Sri Lanka to offer Diploma and Bachelor programs in Buddhist Studies. This led to the establishment of a non-sectarian International Buddhist College (IBC) that embraces all three traditions namely Chinese, Theravada and Tibetan. IBC in southern Thailand offers Bachelor, Masters and PhD programs in Buddhist Studies, as well as e-learning Certificate and Master's courses in Chinese and English.

In 2007, the Malaysian Ministry of Education approved the relocation of Phor Tay High School (SMJKPT) to the southwest district of Penang island. Venerable Wei Wu and the other board members took up the responsibility of relocating the school. The new school building was completed at the end of 2008.

Than Hsiang's Vision

A breakthrough in the crisis

WHO declared the Covid-19 outbreak a pandemic in December 2019. Malaysia was not spared. The Prime Minister announced on 16 March 2020 that the whole



country would be under a movement control order (MCO) from 18 March. All activities in Than Hsiang were halted for a short period of time only as the crisis brought about a transformation beyond imagination. Transforming the crisis into opportunities brought about positive results. Most activities were made possible with the help of technology. Most of the onsite activities turned virtual including Gong-xiu sessions (group pujas), new skills training, dharma courses and propagation.

Organizational Transformation

Venerable Wei Wu retired as the Abbot of Than Hsiang Temple Penang and its branches in 2019, to serve as a member in the Council of Elders. A Monastic Council consisting of five members was formed in Than Hsiang. All Sangha members are eligible to vote in the election of the Monastic Council. The candidate with the most votes will become the Abbot for a term of five years; the Abbot can be re-elected for the second term only. Retired members will become members of the Council of Elders. Later, a five-member Lay Council was set up, consisting of both male and female members to assist the Monastic Council. Such a combination of three Councils will bring Buddhist activities in Than Hsiang to greater heights.



Reorganization of units

During the pandemic, rather than laying off surplus staff, they were reassigned to other units. Training or skill upgrading courses were organised to help them in their new roles. The Than Hsiang Canteen was also renamed Than Hsiang Kitchen and now provides free vegan lunch boxes for the benefit of the poor and underprivileged.

Social welfare activities during the pandemic

A group of Klang Valley volunteers distributed food, clothing, facial masks and micro-oxygen cylinders to the flood victims during the pandemic. Target groups included illegal foreign workers, indigenous people and workers in the red-light district. The welfare team in Penang also donated medical equipment to various hospitals in Penang and Kedah.

In the wake of natural disasters, the support teams are ever ready to provide relief support in kind as well as emotional and spiritual counselling.



Than Hsiang Future Project

Monasteries

Than Hsiang will build an environmentally friendly monastery in Province Wellesley (Seberang Perai). Than Hsiang's main monastery in Malaysia will be located in Tanjung Malim, about 50 minutes from the city center of Kuala Lumpur.

Welfare

Than Hsiang will establish a hospital in Sitiawan, Perak and a large senior citizens' village in Sungai Petani, Kedah.





Education

The International Buddhist College (IBC) in southern Thailand, will offer programs in early childhood education (ECE), psychological counselling and elderly care to train people for the mentioned educational and welfare work other than the Bachelor's, Masters and PhD program in Buddhist Studies.

Expanding Buddhist activities

Than Hsiang will expand to countries such as Thailand, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam, with Thailand as its Indo-China nucleus. Branches or collaborations with local Buddhist organizations would be establish to expand Buddhist activities.

Asia will soon replace the West as the world's leader. Buddhism originated in India and spread to China, Than Hsiang will work with local Buddhist organizations in both countries to spread authentic Buddhism in India and China.



A Brief Introduction of Venerable Wei Wu



Venerable Wei Wu (alias : Shao Kai) was born in 1949, in the beautiful city of Penang. His ancestral home is in Fujian Nan'an. His secular name is Neoh Kah Thong. He became involved in Buddhist activities since he was in high school. He met a number of Buddhists while studying in New Zealand. He began swimming in the sea of Buddhism and became an active Buddhist practitioner and an active dharma propagator.

He was ordained in 1992 and became the Abbot of Than Hsiang Temple in 1993. For the past 30 years, Than Hsiang Foundation has grown rapidly upon the collective good deeds and wishes of the public to promote Buddhist education, welfare and spiritual activities. He founded the non-sectarian International Buddhist College (IBC) in southern Thailand embracing the three traditions (Chinese,



Theravada and Tibetan). IBC offers Bachelor's, Masters and PhD programs in Buddhist Studies on campus and online learning for Masters programs and Certificate in Buddhist Studies courses in English and Chinese.

Presently, Than Hsiang has six branches, eight kindergartens, three Senior Citizens Homes and two Mitra Counselling and Welfare Centers.

Currently Venerable Wei Wu is the President of the Than Hsiang Foundation, Chairman of the International Buddhist College Council, Chairman of the Phor Tay School Board, and Deputy President of the Malaysian Buddhist Sangha Association.

He is an honourable person who is engaged in various educational, cultural, welfare and spiritual activities.

He is highly regarded and respected in the international Buddhist community.



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TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT (TQM) AND THE DHARMA

I applied the Buddha's teachings in my management job before my ordination, I found the Buddha's teachings to be very useful and you need only to apply the teaching of cause and effect.



Total Quality Management and the Dharma

Total Quality Control, or Total Quality Management, was first introduced by the Americans to the Japanese. After the Japanese lost the Second World War, they were in trouble. In order to import food, they had to produce something that could get them the money needed to pay for food. Japan at that time had only cheap labor; meanwhile the quality of Japanese products had a very poor image.

Many quality control experts were sent to Japan to help improve the quality of Japanese products, which were very poor then. These QC gurus helped the Japanese tremendously. The Japanese became keen learners and put into practice what they learned from their American teachers. Later, they started to develop their own version of Total Quality Management (Total Quality Control).

The Union of Japanese Scientists and Engineers (JUSE) was established in May 1946 and was consolidated in 1962 under the jurisdiction of the Science and Technology Agency (now the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology) of the Japanese Government to cope with the rapid advancement of society.

Today, JUSE is widely known in and outside the country as a “Center of Quality Control in Japan.”



Quality

It is worthwhile to begin this paper with a story related by Professor Kaoru Ishikawa¹, a Japanese professor of quality management to provide a clue for the definition of quality in the field of business management. Professor Kaoru¹ was once invited to an Eastern European country to conduct a course on Total Quality Management. He was taken to a watch factory. While there, he wanted to see how they practice Quality Management in the country, so he asked the factory manager whether they produced good quality products. The manager very proudly said: “yes we have good quality products”

Then the Professor said: “Well, if that is the case, your watches must sell very well, since they are of good quality.”

“Unfortunately, this is not the case,” said the factory manager. “Especially now, we have a lot of competition

¹ **Kaoru Ishikawa** (石川馨) (Ishikawa Kaoru) (1915-1989) was a Japanese University professor and influential quality management innovator best known in North America for the Ishikawa or cause and effect diagram (also known as Fishbone Diagram) that are used in the analysis of industrial process.
([http:// en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaoru_ Ishikawa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaoru_Ishikawa) 28/07/2007)



from your country.”

The Professor was curious and asked, “Could you tell me your definition of quality?”

The manager replied: “Well, this is very simple. Quality means ‘conformance to specification’; whether we are talking about a product or service that we are providing, it must conform to specification, a set of specifications actually.”

The Professor nodded and asked, “Well, what are your specifications?”

“Of course, for a watch the most important specification is ‘accuracy’,” replied the factory manager. “If a watch is slower or faster than five minutes for a day, then it fails to conform to our specification.”

When one hears this, one could not help but smile. If a watch is slow by five minutes a day, (now most of the watches are electronic watches and a battery will last for two to three years) then that watch is useless.

So there is a problem with this traditional definition of quality. From that definition, the watches produced by that factory are of high quality, but the problem is that they have the wrong specification. Instead of defining the specification



from the manufacturer's point of view, the modern definition of quality places the emphasis on the user or the customer – it is now defined as '**Fitness for Use**'.

First we must understand the requirements of the customer or user. A product or service is only of good quality if it can satisfy the user or customer. After understanding the requirements and needs of the user, the specifications can then be set; and from there you can design the product. This is referred to as research and development of a product (that will conform to a set of specifications that will satisfy the customer's needs). Then you manufacture according to the specifications. From the product or service to the customer, you have the activities of sales and marketing. When defined in this way, it is a closed loop. It also embraces all the different activities of an organization, especially in the commercial world. Whether it is producing a product or providing a service, the emphasis is on the customer. (See Figure 1.)

We have defined Quality. In Total Quality Management, **quality places the focus on customers or users.**

a) Conformance to Specification



b) Fitness for Use

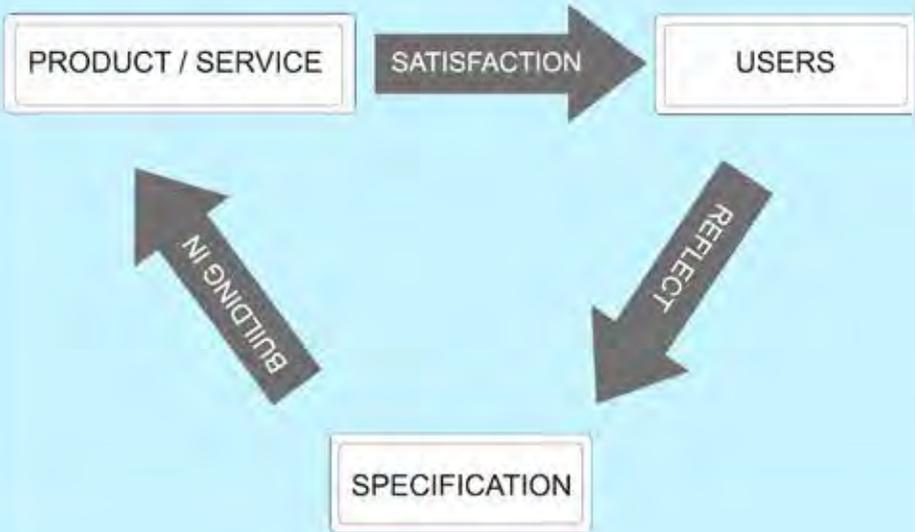


Figure 1: Definition of Quality



Totality

Now let's talk briefly about Totality. What do we mean by 'Total' in TQM? Actually Total Quality Control or Total Quality Management was first introduced by the American to the Japanese. After the Japanese lost the Second World War, they were in trouble. In order to import food, they had to produce something that could get them the money needed to pay for food. Japan at that time had only cheap labor; however Japanese products had very poor image at that time.

When Dr. Armand Vallin Feigenbaum² went to Japan, he taught the Japanese his version of Total Quality Control. In 1955 he wrote a book entitled "Total Quality Control³", and in that book, Dr. Feigenbaum advocated that the responsibility to produce good quality products and services must not be confined to the Quality Department' **Every department in that organization or company must participate**; from

² **Armand V. Feigenbaum** is an American quality control expert who was born in 1922. He wrote several books and served as President of the American Society for Quality (1961 – 1963).
(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Armand_V._Feigenbaum 28/07/2007)

³ **Total Quality Control**, Armand V. Feigenbaum McGraw-Hill Professional, ISBN 0-07-022003-4



Research and Development to Manufacturing, to Sales and Marketing as well as Administration. Of course every big company has a Quality Department, but quality products and services are not the sole responsibility of the Quality Department. That is his concept of Totality and he called it Total Quality Control.

In the Japanese model they also have that Totality as advocated by Feigenbaum; however they also added another dimension defining **Total as Total Participation by all levels of the organization**; from the chairman of the board to the managing director or the CEO down to the first level workers, technicians and even clerical staff. Here Totality means participation from every Department as well as participation from all levels of that organization in the TQM activities.

Then there is a third meaning of Total - Total Perspective. So when we talk about Total Quality Management, TQM, it is no longer just confined to the quality of the product or service, but is expressed to mean **the Total way of running a business that embraces all activities** – quality productivity, sale, cost, delivery etc.

Of course, at the core, the achievement of product and service quality is most emphasized, but besides that, Total Quality Control also pays attention to controlling cost,



expanding sales, improving production and productivity, and also delivering on time. In the modern world of high competition, you have to continue to find a way to shorten delivery time. If we need to present it in a picture, the core is Quality, defined from the customer's perspective. But you cannot produce a very, very expensive product. That is not competitive, so cost, delivery, sales and productivity have to be taken care of – see Figure 2.



Figure 2: Quality is the Core of TQM

I remember my professor was once invited to a division of a big U.S. multi-national company as a Quality Management consultant. He asked the Management Team to give him a report on what they were doing to promote Quality. There was a lengthy presentation from the General



Manager himself and his staff. Then they had coffee break. As you know Americans like to eat doughnuts during coffee break, the Professor picked up a doughnut and said, “Today I see a doughnut phenomenon in your company, because in your report I can’t even smell the customers. Everything you described to me is from your own view point.

It is not from the view point of the customers.”

One of the keen managers said to the Professor, “Oh! Yes, Professor I like your analogy. We Americans like to drink coffee, so it is drinking coffee without milk and sugar.”

When he said that, he thought that the Professor would praise him. The Professor said, “No, it is like drinking coffee without coffee!”

So do you get the meaning? The Professor was talking about Total Quality Management with no consideration for the customers. That is why he used the doughnut analogy. He said this is a doughnut phenomenon because the core is empty, like a doughnut.



Management

In TQM, we divide Management into two major categories – Routine or Daily Management and Breakthrough Management.

The foundation of good management is called Routine Management or Daily Management. Many of you have heard about ISO9000⁴, and many of you might be working in big organizations and have been involved in ISO certification. ISO9000 is a very important and good system to enhance Daily Management or Routine Management of an organization.

The key idea of ISO9000 is standardization, so that continuity is maintained when you performed certain activities and when this is passed on from one person to another. The problem with many small businesses or what we sometimes call family businesses, is that, normally all the experiences are in the head of the founder, and when

⁴ The **International Organization for Standardization (ISO)** (in French; L'Organisation internationale de normalisation) is an international standard-setting body composed of representatives from various national standard bodies. Founded on 23 February 1947, the organization produces world-wide industrial and commercial standards. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Organizati_on_for_Standardization 28/07/2007)



he goes away, all the experiences go away with him and the next person has to start from zero. With a good Daily Management or Routine Management system, you have standardization and documentation of all important things you do - all the important ways of running the business are well documented. Therefore it does not matter who is assigned to a particular responsibility.

Another important aspect of Routine Management is to seek for continuous improvement in performance measures on quality, productivity, sale and cost. **The magnitude of improvement is typically between three to five percent annually.**

There is another type of management activity which cannot be easily translated into English. In Japanese it is known as **Hoshin Kanri** – or Chinese Fang Zhen Kuan Li (方針管理). Hoshin is ‘policy’, ‘direction’ etc, Kanri is Control or Management. This deals with important activities at the top management level whereby the top management set the direction, vision and policy of that organization which is able to motivate and drive the entire organization towards that common vision, goal and direction. Typically this type of management activity looks further into the future, so it is not short-sighted like looking at obtaining good results on a daily or monthly basis.



Hoshin Kanri also seeks breakthrough. There is a beautiful story from Matsushita on this. This is the story of the car radio division of Matsushita. (Of course, now we are more sophisticated, we talk about an audio system in an automobile.) At one time this division of Matsushita was supplying car radio to a car manufacturer. They had the business for over three years. Every year, they would renew the contract for the subsequent year. That had been going on smoothly and every year the team from the customer would request for price reduction.

The customer always asked for price reduction on an annual basis, in the first year, Matsushita was able to reduce the price by 8%, followed by 6%, and then 5% in subsequent years. They were going into the negotiation table for the contract of the subsequent year and they had to do their homework. They decided that it was getting tougher for them to reduce the cost of making the radio, so they were going to offer a 4% reduction in the price for the new contract. They knew that the customer would bargain very hard, so they were prepared to give 5%. That was their idea.

The Matsushita group went to the meeting and after the initial greetings; the representatives of the customer wasted no time and said, "We like you very much. Your quality has been good, no complaints from customers and your delivery has also been very prompt, so it does not



affect our own production but a competitor of yours who is very keen in this business had approached our very senior management. They offered to supply the car radio for our next year model at a price which is 40% lower than what you are currently selling us. So please consider this offer.”

The immediate reaction from the Matsushita team was, “What, 40%?!” “Yes, it was 40%.” The Matsushita team replied that it was a very, very unusual request. They could not be rude to a customer and tell the customer, “No way!” instead they said, “Since your request is very unusual, please allow us to go back, look into it and then we will come back with an official quotation.” As soon as they left the customer’s place, they said, “How can it be? It is an insult to us. We had done our homework, and we were prepared to give a 4% reduction. How could they ask for a 40% reduction which is ten times what we could give? This is just impossible, unless we want to lose money by subsidizing the customer.”

This request was so unusual that the story went around Matsushita, and eventually they had a meeting but they had already decided to give up. They had to politely give a formal quotation. Then the founder of Matsushita, none other than the grand old man Konosuke Matsushita, came into the meeting uninvited. He told his managers, “Well, I heard about all this. Let me tell you this. I think, we have



a very, very kind customer. There is already a competitor of ours, who is offering to be their supplier at a price 40% cheaper than what we are currently charging them, so the customer could have just written us off. Of course there is no way that we could match that price, but they are so kind and they are giving us another chance. They are giving us a very important piece of information also, that is to say, there is a competitor, who can supply the car radio at 40% cheaper than what we are doing. So this is a very important piece of information.”

The grand old man had also done his homework. He said, “In terms of market share, we are number three, very far behind the market leaders, if we are able to accept this challenge and offer to continue to supply this radio, at 40% cheaper than what we are currently doing, then there is a chance for us to become number one!” Then he said something very philosophical, “Let me also tell you this. **It is easier for us to reduce the cost by 50% than by 5%!**”

You heard it right! Most of you must be thinking, “How can that be? 5% must surely be easier to achieve than 50% reduction.” You must understand what this grand old man was trying to say. When you are trying to reduce the cost by 5%; how do you do this? You essentially do this with Routine Management. You essentially try to do this the same old way. **But if you have to reduce it by 50% then**



nothing short of a breakthrough will achieve that, so you have to forget about the way you manufacture that radio. You have to forget about the way you design that radio, and even the way you market that radio! You have to seek a breakthrough. So the definition of a breakthrough is setting a target that you do not know how to achieve when the target is set.

This is Breakthrough Management. Obviously you must understand that in order to achieve Breakthrough Management you need to be very focused.

Let me add an interesting episode by my Professor in another division of the same multinational company that he visited. A report was made to him, and after that, the Professor asked the general manager, “This morning you showed me many, many plans. Could you please tell me which one out of the seven or eight things you mentioned is the most important?”

The general manager said, “Professor, being an academican maybe you don’t know my job. I have to take care of so many things. Of course all of them are important to me.”

Then the Professor said to this manager, “The problem with you is that you have too many girlfriends!”



With Breakthrough Management, you are not allowed to have so many girlfriends. You have to focus on one thing, maybe at the most two. This way, the entire organization is focused on achieving the breakthrough. So this is Breakthrough Management.

Then in Breakthrough Management, in Hoshin Kanri, you have to be very farsighted. Konosuke Matsushita, the grand old man, had a long term plan for Matsushita. When we talk about long term plan in an organization, we typically have a five year plan. (In Malaysia for example the government has five year plans; now we are into the 12th Malaysian five year plan.) **Matsushita has a plan which stretches over 250 years!**

You may say this old man must be crazy. He is not going to live 250 years, but he set a 250 year plan for his organization. He wants his company to out live him. I told our members in Than Hsiang that as Buddhists, we could have 250 life plans for ourselves in our spiritual cultivation!

His philosophy on running his company is also very interesting. In many companies the most important objective is to make profit. Matsushita on the other hand said, **“Our objective is not to make profit, but to serve the society.”**

Actually in the wisdom of this grand old man displays



a lot of Dharma. This is the Dharma of cause and effect. **If you focus on the cause, the right one, then of course you will get good results.**

For me, when I started working in a multinational company, I told myself, that if the Dharma is very good then I should be able to apply it in my job. Initially my job was technical in nature but very soon I moved on to a management role. I applied the Dharma, and it worked very well. But of course, in a multi-religious background we do not emphasize this as a Buddhist teaching. For example, if you are able to apply cause and effect, then you will do very well. I did that and it helped me a lot in my management job.

Then after a while, I looked at the Buddhist organizations and said to myself, “Buddhist temples and Buddhist organizations are generally not very well managed, so could I apply some of the things that I have learned on modern management in Buddhist organizations?” I started doing that in Than Hsiang Temple. I taught Quality Management in Than Hsiang, and it worked very well also.

It had been a long time, nearly fifteen years in fact since I talked on this kind of topic in public. Last year, I was invited by Sin Chew newspaper to give a Dharma talk. Originally, I wanted to talk on a special Buddhist teaching on ‘Exchanging of Self with Others’. In Chinese, it is ‘Zi



ta xiang huan fa' (自他相換法), and the person in charge said, "No, this type of title will not attract people. Could you please, choose another title?"

I decided that I was going to talk about 'Exchanging of Self with Others' anyway, but before that I would talk about TQM. They liked that very much.

In Buddhist teachings management is ultimately self-management. It is spiritual cultivation.

Empathy

In Than Hsiang we have a counseling centre with professional people as full-time staff doing counseling. We also have a big group of volunteers, who have to undergo very intensive training before they are allowed to do any counseling. In counseling skills, we emphasize a lot on 'empathy'. If you are trying to help someone psychologically, you must put yourself in the shoes of that person. Counseling is done not from the counselor's view but from that of the person who is seeking your help.

The Buddhist teaching is even more profound than this and I am going to move onto a very interesting teaching on 'Exchanging of Self with Others'. This teaching was given



by the great Indian teacher, Shantideva⁵, who wrote the book called “Bodhisattvacaryavatara – Entering the Path of Bodhisattva”. He used this to develop the aspiration for Perfect Buddhahood.

Dharma On ‘Exchanging of Self with Others’

There are several important steps to develop in practising ‘Exchanging of Self with Others’ and I will cover them one by one:

First, is to contemplate on the sameness of one’s self and others. You can look at all the people around you. In fact, in Buddhist teachings we talk about “all beings” in the six different realms of Samsāra. All beings without exception seek happiness and do not want suffering. We see this not only in humans, but even in animals. The animals, just

⁵ **Shantideva** (sometimes Śantideva, Zh: 寂天) was an 8th-century Indian Buddhist scholar at Nalanda University and an adherent of the Prasangika Madhyamaka philosophy. Shantideva is particularly renowned as the author of the Bodhicaryavatara (sometimes also called the Bodhisattvacaryavatara). It is a long poem describing the process of enlightenment from the first thought to full Buddhahood and is still studied by Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhists today. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shantideva> 28/07/2007)



like us, also seek happiness and avoid suffering. All beings equally seek happiness and try to avoid suffering. When you consider the sheer number of beings other than yourself, the number is infinitely more than just one person or being. Surely the welfare of sentient beings is greater than the welfare of one. This is the sameness or equality of self with others. In fact, the Buddhist teaching emphasizes a lot on equality.

Two months ago, we went to a conference in Bodhgaya⁶. In the closing, we had a very interesting guest of honour, the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, Shri Gopalkrishna Gandhi. Shri G. Gandhi said that the Buddha had liberated two groups of people 2500 years ago. First were the women, when the Buddha allowed the establishment of the Bhikshuni Sangha. At that time, women had no position in Indian society, especially in the religious circle, so that was a breakthrough. Second, the Indian had the caste system where people of the lower castes were treated very poor by those of the higher castes. The Buddha rejected the caste system. The Buddha accepted members of all the different castes into his order of monastic Sangha. And

⁶ **Bodh Gaya** or **Bodhgaya** (24° 41' 60N, 84° 58' 60E) is a city in Gaya district in the Indian state of Bihar. It is famous for being the place of Buddha's attainment of Enlightenment. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodh_Gaya 28/07/2007)



when they entered the Sangha, they no longer carried that caste distinction with them.

Shri G. Gandhi said that sadly after the disappearance of Buddhism from India, the two groups of people liberated by the Buddha were again oppressed. When India gained independence, the constitution clearly stated that no one should be discriminated based on caste. In reality this is not the case, when you go to India, you can see that it is still very prevalent by reading the classified advertisements of Indian newspapers. Indian parents still arrange marriage for their children. When the children are ready to be married, parents looking for a son-in-law or daughter-in-law will advertise in the papers. Their advertisements are classified according to caste, there is no inter caste marriage. The Buddha, however, advocated equality.

Second, is to contemplate on the faults of self-cherishing. Self-cherishing is the behavior of being self-centered. We have to contemplate on the faults of possessing a self-centered attitude. You will find people who are extremely self-centered behaving as if the whole world revolves around them. If you are very selfish then you would develop poor interpersonal relationship with others, as being selfish you are inconsiderate and no one likes a selfish person therefore you have very few friends, this is very obvious.



More seriously, you must understand that being selfish and self-centered, is closely connected with attachment to self. In the Buddha's teachings one has to practice anatta or no-self, if one wants to get out of samsāra. But if you are attached to the self, then this binds you to samsāra and you will continue to be in the circle of birth and rebirth in one of the six realms according to the ripening of previous karmic seeds you have planted. These are the faults of cherishing oneself.

Third, is to contemplate on the benefit of cherishing others. Conversely, instead of just looking after one's interest, we now put the emphasis on others. This is called cherishing others. When we show kindness to others or when we experience the kindness shown to us we should show our gratitude, thus you will have very good interpersonal relationship.

In this modern age of ours, there is a big problem with industrialization and commercialization. Many parents, both husband and wife, have to work for a living thus the children do not receive enough parental attention. Youths and children nowadays do not understand gratitude. They take a lot of things for granted. Whenever we organize a camp in Than Hsiang Temple, we always try to emphasize this traditional value of showing gratitude to parents and to people who have been kind to us.



When we receive the kindness of others, then it is also our responsibility to reciprocate the kindness by being kind to others. In fact, in Bahasa Malaysia, we have a very beautiful way of expressing appreciation, “terima kasih”⁷. What is “terima kasih”? It is expressing your gratitude for receiving a kindness shown by a person, so you say “terima kasih” - very beautiful actually.

If you can develop this opposite attitude of cherishing others, instead of cherishing yourself, then you start to practice the Sīla. You practice the Pañca Sīla:

- abstaining from killing even abstaining from causing any form of harm to others,
- abstaining from taking the not given,
- abstaining from sexual misconduct,
- abstaining from false speech, and
- abstaining from taking intoxicants.

So when you practice the Panca Sila, you have the consideration of others in mind, rather than being very selfish. For example, people who are very greedy and have a big appetite for seafood like to go to a seafood restaurant and pick the fish that is still swimming in the tank. They say that such a fish is good to eat because it is fresh. You must

⁷ **Terima kasih** translated literally means “receive my love, my gratitude”



understand that you enjoy your food at the expense of the poor fish. In the Buddhist teachings, this is considered most unskillful.

There is a saying, “Cease to do evil, learn to do good.” Ceasing to do evil and learning to do good is the foundation. This is the Sīla aspect. This is followed by, purifying the mind. In purification of the mind, there are two aspects namely Samādhi and Pañña. When we cultivate mentally, we cultivate Samatha and Vipassanā. This is built upon Sīla or morality. In the Buddhist teachings, morality is the foundation for us to continue to purify the mind or to practice meditation.

The greatest benefit of cherishing others is that if you are ultimately able to practice anatta or detaching from self attachment, then you can get out of samsāra and attain Nibbāna. However, if your aspiration to attain Nibbāna is not for oneself alone but for all sentient beings because you understand that all sentient beings from beginningless past until now have been your own mother before, who is as kind as your mother in this life; could you not want to help these mother sentient beings? It is like not caring when your own mother suffers. However if you have the aspiration to attain Perfect Buddhahood or Sammāsambuddha and help sentient beings then that aspiration is Bodhicitta⁸. And that is what the Buddha did.



Fourth, is to practice ‘Exchanging of Self with Others’. What do we mean by that? Let me try to put it simply:

“Just as I previously have
no concern for others
(that is being very self-centered);
Now I will abandon concern for myself.
And just as I previously cherish myself,
Now I will cherish others”.

So instead of cherishing your own self, cherish others. Instead of the could-not careless attitude about others, now you turn that attitude towards yourself. This teaching is called ‘Exchanging of Self with Others’. Now I will share with you a story that happened in Japan,. There was a young man who was born in a very rich family. His parents left him billions in properties but he gambled away the entire inheritance and he had to start worrying about his livelihood.

Then he remembered that when he was a small boy, he used to go to a temple with his mother. He remembered

⁸ In Buddhism, **bodhicitta** (Ch. 菩提心, pudixin, Jp. bodaishin) is the wish to attain full enlightenment (or Buddhahood) in order to be of benefit to all sentient beings. One whose primary motivation for all of their activities is bodhicitta is called a bodhisattva. Bodhicitta can also refer to the actual Awakened Mind of a Buddha itself.

(<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bodhicitta> 28/07/2007)



as a young boy that the monks there seemed to live a very easy life. He wanted to become a monk, not that he wanted to attain Nibbāna, but it was his form of ‘wan sek’⁹. As he no longer has money he had to worry about mundane things like earning a livelihood.

The abbot of the temple received him and asked him what he wanted. He told the abbot he wanted to become a monk. “Why do you want to become a monk?” asked the abbot. He was not brave enough to say, “I come here to wan sek”, so he just kept quiet. Then the abbot said, “No, I think you have the wrong idea. You must be thinking that the monks lead a very easy life here, but this is not so. They actually work very hard. If you do not believe me, you ask all the monks here. Do not think that they just lead a very easy life.”

So he asked the young man, “Do you know how to cultivate the land?”

“No,” replied the young man.

The abbot asked him many, many things, all to which

⁹ “**Wan sek**” is Cantonese for “seeking a livelihood”; literally it means “seeking food”



the young man replied, “No.”

Eventually the Abbot said, “Do you know how to cook rice?”

This young man had never cook rice before. Everything, including food was prepared and placed in front of him. So in desperation the Abbot said, “O.K. Please tell me what you can do? What do you know?”

The young man thought for a while and said, “Actually I’m not too bad at playing chess.” He did not know anything else! When he was small, he was born into a rich family, so he was never serious in studies, but he played a lot. He was quite good at chess.

The Abbot was very happy. He said, “O.K., that’s very good.”

The abbot asked his attendant to go to the back quarters and ask an old monk to join them in the reception room. Then, on his way back, the attendant was asked to bring the abbot’s sword. The chess set was laid on the table and the Abbot put the sword next to the chess set. The old monk arrived and was asked to sit opposite the young man. Then the abbot told the young man and the old monk, “You two are going to play a game of chess and whoever losses,



I'm going to chop off his head with this sword here."

The young man was then given the option to withdraw from the game of chess, but he decided he would try and take up this gamble. So he put all his concentration on the game, with no wandering thoughts. He was actually quite good at chess and after a while, he was very confident he was going to win. Then with a sigh of relief, and only then did he look at the old monk opposite him.

He thought to himself, "How can I allow this to happen? My parents had left me with so much money, and I gambled away all the money; so I'm a useless man in society. And now because of me and my livelihood I asked to be a monk here and this old monk, who is so kind in his appearance is going to die because of me."

He thought that if there was one person who had to die, then it had to be him, not the old monk. So he performed the act of exchanging himself with the old monk. Then when it was his turn to make a move, he deliberately made a wrong move. The old monk, who was also quite good at chess, was surprised. The young man continued to deliberately make several more wrong moves. Before too long it was very clear that the young man was going to lose the game, but he was all prepared for that. Of course the Abbot saw all this and he just overturned the chess board saying, "Well,



no one has won and no one has lost.”

The abbot then turned to the young man and said, “You learned two things. One is concentration. When you were playing the game of chess, you concentrated completely on that game. So I know that under proper guidance you can meditate well. I shall be able to guide you to practice meditation. More importantly, you have the potential to be a Bodhisattva, since you were prepared to even lose your life for another person.”

“OK, since you have these two qualities I will accept you,” said the abbot and the young man became a monk at that temple. Of course, that story has a beautiful ending. The young man became a very good monk and became very famous in Japan. Before that he was a playboy, so this is ‘Exchanging of Self with Others’.

Finally, is to meditate on ‘Giving and Taking’. What do we give and what do we take? OK, I will now teach you how to do this. Please close your eyes and visualize that there are many people in front of you, just like in this room, maybe more than in this room. These beings are suffering. The sufferings of beings are transformed into black smoke. Inhale all this black smoke into yourself. When you visualize this, visualize that you are absorbing all the sufferings of these beings that are in front of you. You completely absorb



their sufferings.

After that, you visualize that from your own body, because you have received the blessings of the Triple Gem, you are able to radiate a brilliant ray of light onto these suffering beings that you visualized in front of you. When this bright, brilliant light shines onto these beings, showers onto them *Mettā* and they receive peace and happiness.

Again, you visualize the sufferings of the beings in front of you are in the form of black smoke, and again you breathe in all this black smoke, completely absorbing the sufferings of these beings in front of you and again you radiate *Mettā* to these beings in front of you. This is the practice. This is a practice of giving *Mettā*¹⁰. Taking the suffering and relieving the suffering of other sentient beings is *Karunā*. So you practice *Mettā* and *Karunā*.

The development of *Mettā* is well practiced, especially in the Theravada Tradition, it is known as *Mettā Bhāvanā*¹¹.

¹⁰ **Mettā (Pali)** or **Maitrī** (Sanskrit) means unconditional and unattached loving kindness. It is one of the ten *pāramitās* of the Theravada school of Buddhism, and the first of the four *Brahmavihāras*. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mett%C4%81> 28/07/2007)

¹¹ The **mettā bhāvanā** (cultivation of **mettā**) is a popular form of meditation in Buddhism. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mett%C4%8128/07/2007>)



Not only *Mettā*, we develop the four *Brāhmavihāras*¹², that is *Metta*, *Karuna*¹³, *Muditā*¹⁴ and *Upekkhā*¹⁵.

There is a beautiful story in a *Mahāyana Sutra*; called *Vimalakirti Sutra*. *Vimalakirti* was a lay *Bodhisattva*, who lived during the time of the Buddha. Once when he was sick,

¹² **Brahmavihāra** (Pali and Sanskrit) can be translated as Sublime Attitudes or Abodes of God. They are also called the “Four Immeasurables,” or “the four sublime attitudes (loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity).” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahmavihara> 28/07/2007)

¹³ In Theravada Buddhism, **karuna** represents one of the four *Brahmaviharas*, along with: *metta*, *mudita*, and *upekkha*. *Karuna* is aptly described as compassion; the hope that a person’s sufferings will diminish; compassion is the “wish for all sentient beings to be free from suffering.” *Karuna* is commonly summed up as wisdom tempered with compassion. Yet more commonly, especially in *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, *karuna* is one of the two qualities, along with wisdom (*prajña*), to be cultivated on the *bodhisattva* path. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karuna> 28/07/2007)

¹⁴ **Mudita**: altruistic joy in the accomplishments of a person, oneself or other; sympathetic joy, “is the wholesome attitude of rejoicing in the happiness and virtues of all sentient beings. It is usually translated as “sympathetic” or “altruistic” joy, the pleasure that comes from delighting in other people’s well-being rather than begrudging it. (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mudita> 28/07/2007)

¹⁵ **Upekkha/Upeksa**: equanimity, or learning to accept both loss and gain, praise and blame, success and failure with detachment, equally, for oneself and for others; equanimity means “not to distinguish between friend, enemy or stranger, but regard every sentient being as equal. It is a clear-minded tranquil state of mind - not being overpowered by delusions, mental dullness or agitation.” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brahmavihara> 28/07/2007)



Manjusri, who personifies Wisdom, went on behalf of the Buddha to enquire on the well being of Vimalakirti.

He asked Vimalakirti, “How are you?”

“Oh! I’m not well,” said Vimalakirti.

“Why are you not well?”

Vimalakirti answered, (the answer is very beautiful),

“I am sick because beings are sick.” This is a great Bodhisattva. Beings are sick because they have the kilesa, or the defilements of greed, anger, and ignorance. An Arahant, a Pācābuddha, a Bodhisatta and a Sammāsambuddha, transcends these kilesas or these three poisons. In the case of a Bodhisattva, he took upon the sufferings of others as his own.

Conclusion

To conclude, in the beginning we talked about Total Quality Management, how I applied the Buddha’s teachings in my management job before my ordination, I found the



Buddha's teachings to be very useful and you need only to apply the teaching of cause and effect.

According to the teaching of cause and effect, you will do very well if you plant good causes. If you are running your own business, your business will be very successful.

Now many people have the idea that if they are running a business they cannot be too honest, do you know what they mean by "too honest"?

They said, "You cannot be too honest, you must tell a little lie." How can this be? If we as Buddhist understand the teaching of Cause and Effect, what is telling a lie? Telling a lie is an unskillful act. If telling a lie can make you prosper, it means that a bad cause can lead to a good result, then there is no Cause and Effect relationship. So if you want good result you must plant the seed, you must plant the cause that will eventually give you good results. Like Konosuke Matsushita¹⁶ said, you have to serve the society. If you serve society well, then your company will be successful.

If you only have profit in mind, then you may do a lot

¹⁶ **Konosuke Matsushita** said: "Don't sell customers goods that they are attracted to. Sell them goods that will benefit them." (Fortune, 1997)



of unscrupulous activities. So please understand, if you are running your own business, honesty is a better policy than dishonesty. Many people think that in the good old days, yes, you can be honest, but not today. No, that is a wrong concept. I would say that honesty was the best policy in the past, honesty is still the best policy now, and honesty will be the best policy in the future.

Of course the Buddha's teachings not only teach us how to live in this world. The value of the Buddha's teachings is to lead us out of suffering altogether and to attain bliss, Nibbana. In order to do that, we have to develop Renunciation. Renunciation is the cause, Nibbana is the end result. However if your motive is not only gaining liberation for yourself; you wish that all sentient beings will be liberated from sufferings. Then you set the goal of achieving Perfect Enlightenment (Sammāsambuddha) so that you may help all sentient beings. You have thus developed Bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the cause and Sammāsambuddha is the end result. We have come a long way; If you are able to practice Renunciation and Bodhicitta, you have transcended TQM altogether.



AM I FREE TO CHOOSE MY NEXT TEACHER



These days some students especially young monastics tend to run away or leave in search of other teachers when they fall out with their teacher. Would such rebellious actions bring them the 120% achievement?



Am I Free to Choose My Next Teacher

Should a teacher want to train his student **in this dharma ending age to attain a 120% achievement he would send the student into the current society.** In the past, it is usual for those in the quest to acquire higher knowledge to try to learn from as many sought after teachers from various places as possible.

“No Freewill While Living in the Current Society” means that one’s actions are governed by the rules and ideologies of the current society that one is in, leaving little room for freewill in other words **living in society one has to abide by the rules and culture of the current era.**

These days some students especially young monastics tend to run away or leave in search of other teachers when they fall out with their teacher. Would such rebellious actions bring them the 120% achievement? More often than not they would fail or achieve less than 30%. Some of these wayward students having a superficial understanding of the Avatamsaka Sutra thought that they could follow the footsteps of the pilgrim Sudhanakumāra as a part of the sutra described how Sudhanakumāra in his spiritual journey studied with a succession of 53 teachers.



No room for freewill actually means that the student should preserve and diligently study under the teacher even when differences or disagreements arises. The practice of leaving for another teacher is common nowadays especially when the teacher is a strict one. Such an attitude and practice is futile and they may end up following the wrong or heterodox teacher.

A good teacher is selfless and would introduce the appropriate teachers to his students in time. Thus the next teacher would be selected by the present or original teacher when the student is seen to have learned all that could be taught by him and this process would go on and on. Students of high capacity could have as many as 50 teachers. The Great Master Atisha had 100 teachers. Thus students must honestly assess their capacity and capability before they try to follow the foot steps of these learned ones.

In fact it is **adequate and sufficient for a student to learn from two or three teachers** instead of going on an excessive and never ending quest to look for better teachers and end up following the wrong or heterodox teachers. As a student or understudy one does lack the capability or wisdom to make such decisions correctly due to one's ignorance.

“Strict teachers produce outstanding students”



is a well known ancient Chinese saying. People used to believe that strict teachers are able to push students to strive for excellence. Nowadays many students see such teachers to be all out to punish and torment them. Actually, good teachers do not harbour such thoughts instead they never leave any stone unturned in their strive to impart their knowledge to their students and would not assume any student to be unteachable.

Nowadays practitioners like Sudhanakumāra or Atisha are extremely rare. Both are no ordinary beings but one who had been practicing for a long period of time, maybe hundreds or even thousands of life times.

Students of this era are not comparable to them and it can be seen that they have weaker foundations or capacity hence would not need to study under too many teachers. Such students may not be able to master all that are transmitted by their teachers even though their teachers had tried their best to do so. Students should honestly evaluate themselves and accept the attribute they possess. They should not be egoist or conceited and think too highly of themselves and their achievements. Some think that they have already mastered all that their teacher has to offer thus decide to leave to learn from another.

I have seen many young monastics who were excellent



students training under their initial teacher but decided to jump to another tradition despite being happy and zealous at the beginning. When asked why, a student would proudly answered that he had learned and roughly mastered all that his teacher had taught.

In truth he had only learned very little, in fact it was just the tip of the iceberg. What a pitfall.

To conclude, **one should treasure and diligently study under one teacher instead of continuing to window-shop or go on a wild goose chase** else one would end up as a jack of all trades and master of none. Lastly one should not be greedy in religious practice but to focus and master the cultivation method or Dharma door most suitable for oneself.



UNITY IN THE SANGHA



The Vinaya rules that are recited by the monastics clearly states that schism is not allowed. Schism or factionalism will create disharmony and the monastic members will be divided.



Unity in the Sangha

The Vinaya rules that are recited by the monastics clearly states that **schism is not allowed. Schism or factionalism will create disharmony and the monastic members will be divided.** The Buddha is against schism or factionalism and accepted disciples from all categories of the caste system namely, the Brahmins (priests and teachers), Kshatriyas (warriors and rulers), Vaishyas (traders and merchants) and the Shudras (laborers). Many believe that the groups originated from Brahma, the Hindu God of creation. The main castes were further divided into about 3,000 castes and 25,000 sub-castes, each based on their specific occupation. Those at the bottom of the hierarchy, who fall outside the four main categories, are considered “untouchables” or Dalits.

The **Buddha denounced the caste system. The Buddha accepted all members from all the caste system** as his disciples in his monastic order. They are united like the rivers as they flow to the sea. They lose their identities such as names, caste and clans and became members of one community, the Sangha. The Buddha said, “Just as, O monks, the great rivers Gangâ, Yamunâ, Aciravati, Sarabhû, and Mahi, on reaching the ocean, lose their earlier name and identity and come to be reckoned as the great ocean,



similarly, O monks, people of the four castes (vannas).... who leave the household and become homeless recluses under the Doctrine and Discipline declared by the Tathâgata, lose their previous names and identities and are reckoned as recluses who are sons of Sâkya” (Udâna 55).

The taste of the seawater is salty, thus have you ever wondered what the taste of renunciation would be like. **Renunciation is liberation.** Liberation from the clutches of defilements however if we are not fully free of the old habits and defilements when we don the robes then we should be ashamed. It is like coming home empty handed after visiting Mt. Treasure. (Boashan, 宝山)

We should not despise the Indian for their caste system as we Chinese are no different. We find that Chinese immigrants will gather and stay together in the country of their choice. For example the immigrants from Fuzhou gathered and stayed in Sitiawan, Perak; while those from Guangdong gathered in the central region of Peninsular Malaysia; while the Hokkiens from Yongchun, Fujian Province settled in Klang or the southern region of Peninsular Malaysia; whilst, the Hokkien from Quanzhou, Xiamen, Zhangzhou and other places made the northern region of Peninsular Malaysia their home. This is how the different cliques like Hokkiens, Guangdong, and sub-divisions of the Guangdong clique like the Hakka and Chaozhou come into being.



Among the monastics here the Hokkiens are most prominent or influential but the Guangdong group (together with Choazhou) as a whole would be on par. When I decided to renounce some thought that I should get a Hokkien master as I am a Hokkien, however that was not a factor I considered as I do not accept schism or factionalism in the sangha.



Fan Bai Made Easy



Fan Bai is the beautiful sound from the celestial beings of the Brahma realm and not worldly sound. It is meritorious should you sincerely sing it well.



Fan Bai Made Easy

Fan Bai (梵呗) a melodious presentation of the hagiography of a Buddha transmitted orally originated in ancient China and India. Oral transmission simply means that teachings are given verbally whereby the teacher teaches and the student listens. The student stays with the teacher and teachings are given depending on the mood or whims and fancy of the teacher. This kind of method resulted in the loss of many skills as this method is inconsistent and the teachings are diluted and distorted or adulterated as it is passed from generation to generation. In the past, before the development of technology, Fan Bai classes could not be taught as effectively as now with the help of audiovisual equipment such as television and AV recordings.

Fan Bai originated in India. Fan in Sanskrit is “Brahma” higher celestial gods (the “four-faced Buddha” that we see is actually the “four-faced god”). Fan Bai is the beautiful sound from the celestial beings of the Brahma realm and not worldly sound. It is meritorious should you sincerely sing it well. Therefore, it is important to be really dedicated and sincere when learning Fan Bai Human chanting standard or level of Fan Bai is very inferior to that of the celestial beings; thus, our presentations would sound like the cawing of the crows! Should the chanting in a monastery be well



presented then the Sangha members would tell you that the monastery is **well protected by celestial beings** as they are pleased. However, if the chanting is inferior and not well presented then not only the celestial beings would be displeased but the deities and dharma protectors will be driven away. Therefore, when learning Fan Bai, we must be respectful. Before we begin our practice, we must inform the celestial beings and deities to stay away. For example, the learner needs to state his or her name and that he or she is a Buddhist, who would like to practise chanting, and beseech them to keep away and ignore the sound he or she would be making during the chanting practice and to accept his or her apologies for any inconvenience caused!!

Some basic chants such as “The Incense Praise,” “Lotus Pool Praise,” and “Praise of Amitabha” (seven-word phrases), have 4/4 time signature meaning that there are 4 pulses (beats) in each measure(bar). The time signature not only indicates the number of counts but which type of note will receive 1 count. The time signature could be mastered by tapping the table with your left and right hands (1234, 2234,... right hand 1, 2, 3; left hand 4,) or by practicing in a choir with a conductor. You could also learn from the online cultivation session of Pu Men Pin (观世音菩萨普门品, The Universal Door of Guan Shi Yin Bodhisattva) and “Amitabha Sutra” (the Shorter Sukhāvāṭīvyūha Sūtra) on YouTube. Those who are musical inclined would be able



pick it up as soon as they hear it. However, some are prone to sing incorrectly as they are not musically inclined or are tone deaf. Nevertheless, if they are willing put in enough effort by going for pitch training to improve their sense of pitch then they would eventually master the skills. It is not only important to follow the time signature or rhythm but also the tempo accurately and to chant accordingly for a good presentation.

Many prefer to learn to sing and play the instruments before mastering the rhythms. This way of learning is considered as a kind of oral transmission. My advice is that the learner must **master the time signature** (counts/beats) first **before learning how to sing and play the chanting instruments**. One should not be too anxious to learn everything simultaneously but to do so step by step. In fact, it would be easier to play the chanting instruments than learning the time signature. It is only right that we adopt the use of technology to improve and facilitate the teaching and learning of Fan Bai. An electronic keyboard can also be used to write out or compose the numbered notation for “the Incense Praise” and “the Praises of the Buddha”. There must be some insights involved in playing the chanting instrument in Dharma assemblies (pujas), only then the sounds of the chanting would be attractive. At the beginning of chanting, the Karmadana (维那, Chant Leader) and the Wooden Fish (木鱼) Player have an important role



in controlling the rhythm and tempo of the chanting. The Karmadana, must begin the chanting slowly, to calm the mind of the audience and participants. During the chants of the “Praises”, Karmadana together with the Wooden Fish Player controls the rhythm. In the monasteries in China, both Karmadana and Wooden Fish Player would stand face-to-face to synchronise and support each other through eye contact.

After the “Praises”, sutra and Dharani/mantra is chanted. The tempo of the chanting could be slower at the beginning of each of the chants, and accelerate upon the release of the palms. From then on, the tempo of the chanting is controlled by the beating of the Wooden Fish instead. The speed of the chanting depends on how well the sutra or mantra is memorized. Basic Mantras, Dharani or Sutras like the “Great Compassion Mantra”, “Amitabha Sutra” can be chanted at a fairly fast pace. Thus, it is important to keep in mind that the chanting should be done at a fairly fast speed otherwise it would be impractical.

Now, we will talk about how to adjust our body, regulate our breath and control our mind. We must first **adjust our bodies and regulate our breaths before we can tune our minds**. There are teachings on breath regulations in China and India. Unlike western medicine that focuses on the physical body only, the Chinese and Indians treat both the



body and mind. Similarly, Fan Bai is different from normal singing, because to make **a good Fan Bai** presentation both the **body and mind need to be well maintained.**

There is an interesting story about scholar who wanted to learn Chan from a Chan master. The master invited the scholar to have tea with him. When serving the tea, the Chan master filled his guest's cup to the brim and did not stop thus the tea overflowed and ran over. "Stop! The cup is full!" said the scholar. The master replied, "You are like this cup; you are full of ideas. I cannot put anything in. Thus, before I teach you, you have to **empty your cup.**" This is a great reminder that in order to learn something new, we have to be humble and be ready to learn from the basic, that is, to empty our mind and make room for the new lesson. In the book "The Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment" (Lamrim Chenmo) three types of attitudes are described using containers as analogies. The first the inverted container, second the defiled container, and third the leaking container. If our attitude is inappropriate, then, good teachings would be perceived as evil.

Let's use "The Incense Praise" of the online Pu Men Pin cultivation to practice the 4/4-time signature (four counts per measure) by tapping on the table (1234, 2234, 3234 ...). We must be cautious when the note is a longer. If the tempo is inconsistent then it can be annoying to those who are present during the chanting. Those who have problems



or challenges holding long notes are usually not musically inclined or tone deaf. Thus, it is very important to master the time signature that signifies number of beats or rhythm before taking up the chanting instruments. Those who are not musically inclined or tone deaf would find it challenging to pick up Fan Bai via the oral transmission. Those who are said to be tone deaf actually have problems recognizing the differences in pitch. It would not be surprising that they may never master it. Being musically talented has to do with one's previous lives. Likewise, the chances of a person renouncing in this life also depends on whether he or she had been a monastic in his or her previous lives. However, the conditions to renounce can be cultivated by making sincere aspirations to the Buddhas or Bodhisattvas. Similarly, if one cannot sing then one could learn to do so through hard work and dedication. That is to train the ear to recognize the difference in pitch. The purpose of using chanting instruments during Dharma assemblies is to ensure that the flow and tone of the chanting is consistent. By mastering the beats or tempo and rhythm and being mindful the Karmadana would be able to orchestra a harmonised chanting presentation.

The "Incense Praise", "Lotus Pool Praise" and "The Praise of Amitabha", are chants that are sung with the 4/4 count time signature. This link (<https://youtu.be/2zMg6AlnPd4>) uses numbered musical notation and



is a good video to learn these chants. After learning from the video, you can change the chanting speed from normal (1.0) to one that is faster (above 1.0) or slower (below 1.0). Generally, music is not to please the ear. **Fan Bai is meant to aid Buddhists in their practice.** Thus, Buddhist chants should not be secularized. Nowadays it is a trend to use popular tunes that may not be suitable to chant the Sutras. It is important that fan bai is not secularized, otherwise it would be like a monk dressed in monastic robes but living and behaving like a laity. Even Lay Buddhist practitioners must be mindful of their behavior to avoid giving the public a negative impression of Buddhists thus affecting the image of Buddhism as a whole.

When donning the monastic robes, one's conduct should be worthy of the monastics. Similarly, the laities when donning the prayer robes or haiqing (海青) should be mindful of their conduct so as not to tarnish the image of Buddhism. My advice to young Buddhists is **not to take up Fan Bai solely because the melody is pleasant.** This is often the case but we need to try to refrain from doing so. We should **not simply change the tune** based on our own opinion or preference or to merely make it sound good. This is the present trend nowadays. To **prevent** the original Fan Bai **from going extinct we should use a modern approach** like using numbered musical notation which is more systematic rather than adhering to oral transmission,



because important data or skills are easily lost or adulterated when it is passed down through oral transmission.

The Southern and Tibetan Buddhists sit while chanting while traditional Chinese Buddhists stand while chanting. It is because standing while chanting makes the chanting more enchanting. Southern Buddhists generally chant, without the use of instruments. However, in Chinese temples especially during dharma assemblies where many devotees gather it is necessary to use chanting instruments to synchronize and maintain consistency. Each society has its own music (both with or without words), India is no different, Aśvaghōṣa one of the Buddhist patriarchs in India, was very talented in art. He was known as the founder of Buddhist classical music. He composed hymns, and poems that give bliss and Dharmic joy to meditators. He skillfully disseminated the Buddha Teachings through poems and hymns.

To practice Amitabha Recitation successfully, we must understand when to go slow and accelerate. During the Seven-Day Amitabha Recitation Retreat, we sit and recite the Buddha's name simultaneously in crescendo (soft to loud) and accelerando (slow to fast). There is a reason for doing this. **Recitation faster and faster or in accelerando prevents the mind from wondering in between recitation.** When we recite at a very fast pace, then there is no chance for wondering thoughts to set in. When reciting loudly and



at a fast pace, it is best not to articulate the sounds but to chant from the diaphragm. **“Singing from the diaphragm”** gives one greater breath capacity, which allows one to hold phrases longer. That is how the leader should chant so that his throat will not get hoarse after a session.

In the “Five-Session Amitabha Recitation” the recitation is divided into five sessions. After chanting “The Praise of Amitabha”, the first session commences with the six-syllable recitation of “Na-mo-A-mi-tuo-fo”. The recitation of “Na-mo-A-mi-tuo-fo” would gradually increase in volume (crescendo) and speed (accelerando) from session 1 to 3, the four-syllable “A-mi-tuo-fo” would be chanted during the fourth and fifth session in the same manner. However, the fifth session is the most difficult as it has a total of 20 tones. It usually takes about half an hour to complete the five sessions. (the duration of the recitation could be adjusted)

Shifu would like to emphasize that **practice makes perfect and diligent self-reflection after each class is crucial in developing the skills. In Fan Bai learning, apart from the art of chanting, mastering the rhythm is also essential.** Otherwise, Shifu’s efforts in teaching this would be futile.



THE DIVISION OF SECTARIAN BUDDHISM

The first division of the original sangha occurred approximately one hundred years after the parinirvana of Shakyamuni Buddha, sometime after the Second Buddhist Council due to disputes over the Vinaya.



The Division of Sectarian Buddhism

The first division of the original sangha occurred approximately one hundred years after the parinirvana of Shakyamuni Buddha, sometime after the Second Buddhist Council due to disputes over the Vinaya. The split saw the emergence of two sects or schools namely the Sthaviravāda branch (“the elders”) and Mahāsāṃghika branch (“of the great Sangha”).

The seniors or elders (Sthavira in Sanskrit) formed the Sthaviravāda while the more liberal but orthodox majority formed the Mahāsāṃghika. The “Mahāsāṃghika” was less willing to accept the ideas of the other sects. They even suspected that many of the additions were created by the senior monks themselves. Further sub-divisions followed, leading to the emergence of eighteen schools in total. These eighteen schools together with the first two sects were sometimes known or referred to as the twenty sects.

Dharmaguptaka is the fundamental Sthaviravada branch of Chinese Buddhist tradition, and Mūlasarvāstivāda, the fundamental Sthaviravada branch of Tibetan Buddhism. They are both branches of Sthaviravada, thus the modern Theravada Buddhism cannot monopolize the term Sthaviravāda. It began as



a Theravada (Southern Buddhism) tradition in Sri Lanka, but it is a branch of the Tāmraśāṭīya that falls under **the fundamental Sthaviravāda** in India that is similar to Dharmaguptaka and Mūlasarvāstivāda.

The names of the 18 schools are in Sanskrit and are not known as Theravada. Among these 18 schools, the **Sthaviravāda** has more branches than the **Mahāsāṃghika**.

All of these branches have their own Sutra Pitaka, Vinaya Pitaka, and Abhidharma Pitaka. In the early period only the Vinaya Pitaka is different and each sect had its unique viewpoint. In fact, the content of the Vinaya Pitaka of these schools are essentially identical but each sect has its own interpretation of the Abhidharma Pitaka. There are two schools with relatively complete versions. One of them in Sanskrit is known as the Sarvāstivāda: sarva (every or all), asti (exist), and vada (theory) that means “the theory of all existence.” The origin of this version can be traced to Central Asia. It is recorded in Indian history that a Buddhist king in Central Asia, King Kanishka, was a great patron of Sarvāstivāda. The Sabbatthivāda of the Theravadins is the translated Pali version of the **Sarvāstivāda**.

Now there are three living Buddhist traditions, one of which is the Theravada tradition (Southern Buddhism), that spread to Southeast Asia from India to Sri Lanka in the south;



the other two are Chinese Buddhist tradition and Tibetan Buddhist tradition. In Theravada Buddhism and some other sects, after living a monastic life for 10 years, one is called a Thero (Sthavira). After 30 years of being a monastic, one reached the rank of Mahathero (Mahasthavira). As a result, when the monastic order was split, those elders remained staunchly conservative.

The Prātimokṣa (Sanskrit) or Buddhist monastic code transmitted in Chinese Buddhist tradition should not be referred to as “Mahayana or Chinese Prātimokṣa” as Dharmaguptaka belonged to the fundamental Sthaviravada. The Prātimokṣa that Chinese monks followed are derived from a branch of the fundamental Sthaviravada that is very close to the branch that emerged in Sri Lanka after Ashoka. Therefore if we were to compare the Prātimokṣa of the Theravada tradition in Sri Lanka to that of the Dharmaguptaka, we can see that they are essentially similar. The Bhikshu precepts in the Dharmaguptaka-vinaya, or “The Quarter Vinaya” (四分律) consists of a set of 250 monastic rules. It is contained in the Sanskrit canon of the Sarvāstivāda (Doctrine That All Is Real) tradition that was widely known in Northern Buddhist countries. The Theravada tradition has a set of 227 monastic rules. After the Tipitaka arrived in Sri Lanka, Buddhaghosa assembled the first collection in Pali at Aluvihara, which was then written into Sinhala script on pattra leaves.



In Tibet, there is a monastic ordination that belongs to a sub-sub-branch of the fundamental **Sthaviravada**; the **Mūlasarvāstivāda**; a sub-branch of the **Sarvāstivāda**.

Very often the Chinese and Tibetan precepts are mistakenly categorized as Mahayana precepts. It is important to note that **Bhikshu precepts of all schools belong to the Hinayana or Śrāvaka precepts.** The monks of the two schools mentioned earlier follow the **Śrāvaka** precepts as well.

The Bhikkhuni precepts were previously found in Southern Buddhism (Theravada) countries as well, but have since been lost, possibly because they are more focused on males and neglected the females. There are very diligent female monastics in the Southeastern Asian countries, such as Thailand. These monastics are not recognized as nuns even though they follow the precepts strictly. They don white attires. Those who received the eight or ten precepts in Myanmar wear pink attires. Not long ago, some women from Southern and Tibetan countries received the Bhikshuni precepts (four-part vinaya) of **Dharmaguptaka-vinaya** with the assistance of Chinese Buddhist elder monks and nuns.



WHY VEGANISM



I would like to emphasize that being on 'A vegan diet, is better than just being on a vegetarian one!' The meaning is very clear: avoid drinking milk; eating eggs and dairy products like ice-cream, yogurt, cheese etc.



Why Veganism

Nutritionist can be misleading these days, for example they will encourage you to consume milk claiming that milk can help prevent osteoporosis as milk is rich in calcium. Apparently, milk will strengthen your bone structure making it strong. Is this true? You can observe that **there are more osteoporosis patients in the big milk consuming countries** like Australia, Europe, America. Dairy and dairy products companies are so wealthy and influential that even the American politicians are under their thumbs. They are able to indoctrinate the public into believing that milk and its products are good for health without being challenged. On the contrary, **milk is disastrous for humans especially cancer patients as cancer cells love milk!**

I would like to emphasize that being on '**A vegan diet, is better than just being on a vegetarian one!**' The meaning is very clear: avoid drinking milk; eating eggs and dairy products like ice-cream, yogurt, cheese etc. I used to love these very much, but now I do not take them anymore. Nowadays we have so many plant-based alternatives from soya, almonds, oat, rice and coconut.

While human babies need breast milk, calves also need milk from their mothers, it is very cruel to deprive calves



of their milk. It is only natural for human babies to consume breast milk and not cow's milk! The scenario is so different from when I was studying in New Zealand where cattle roam in the green fields, **now cows raised for the dairy industry, are confined and treated like milk producing machines.** They are genetically manipulated, loaded with antibiotics and hormones so that they stay healthy and can produce more milk. Cows suffer greatly in dairy farms; **male calves are allowed to live for 5 to 6 months** before they are slaughtered. Veal is the meat of calves while beef is from older cattle. Generally, veal is more expensive. The **Covid-19 pandemic may be strongly connected with "factory farming of animals"**. Could this be our shared karma?

"You simply should not eat a lot of eggs, particularly egg yolks, where most of the cholesterol is located," said Micheal Hill, MD, a professor of neuroscience at the Cumming School of Medicine at the University of Calgary in Canada. It is better not to eat eggs, because firstly **eggs consumption is associated with death from heart disease and cancers.** Secondly you are **killing mother earth.** I recalled that a student of the International Buddhist College was advised to boost his protein intake by eating eggs I felt exasperated as I know that eating eggs is not good.



It can be seen that heart disease is very common among Westerners. Westerners have the habit of taking eggs and bacon/sausages for breakfast. Thus, you would more **likely to succumb to heart disease if your diet contains mainly meat, eggs, milk and dairy products.** Recently one of our sangha members had to undergo a bypass due to severe blockage.

Some people have no problem with eating unfertilized eggs since no life is taken. However, if you ponder further, you would realize that there is more to factory farmed eggs than you think. In the egg industry, unfertilized eggs are sold for consumption while fertilized eggs are hatched. Shortly after birth, the female and male chicks are separated. The female will lead a short life of laying eggs while the **male chicks are thrown into the trash to die or grounded alive** ending up as pet food or fertilizers. Comparatively, male calves are better off than these male chicks as they get to live for 5 to 6 months before being slaughtered for their meat.

Egg eaters and supporters of the egg industry are **indirect killers of male chicks.** Thus, by not consuming eggs, meat, milk and dairy products you are avoiding the suffering from the unwholesome karma of taking lives and destroying mother earth. The karma of taking life poses a big problem here where **male chicks are killed soon after**



birth and male calves can only live up to 5 or 6 months. There is a chicken factory farm near one of our centers where you can see chickens being subjected to inhumane treatments such as extreme confinement and being pumped with growth-promoting drugs to ensure large and fast growth so that these birds which would reach ‘processing’ weight to be sold to some fried chicken enterprise within six to seven weeks.

From the Buddhist, humanitarian and health perspective, we should go on a vegan diet and not only be a vegetarian and stop eating meat, eggs, milk and dairy products. At the start of our Go Vegan project, there was a query on why being a vegetarian isn’t good enough. I answered, “after choosing to be a vegetarian isn’t it better to go vegan?”.

I started being a vegetarian, a diet that included eggs, milk and dairy products. While working in a factory in Malaysia, the cook will make me a cheese omelette almost every day till I got sick of it. Later, I told the cook that I stopped eating eggs. Obviously, the cheese omelet is bad as it not only contains eggs but cheese too!

When I was still taking milk and dairy products many senior members of Than Hsiang would frequently offer me ice-cream knowing that it’s one of my favorites. I also like



pizzas and yogurt, especially the plain or natural one. When I visit or stay in IBC I was served yogurt daily.

Years later I came across a book entitled “**Diet for a New America**” by John Robbins. The book **discusses veganism, vegetarianism, animal rights and the environmental impact of factory farming**. John Robbins is the only son of the founder of the Baskin Robbins ice cream empire. He was to inherit his father’s business but chose to to give up the immense wealth of the family business.

As a child he was always sick, obviously he and his family ate meat, dairy products and lots of ice-cream. When his uncle died at the age of 54 of a heart attack, he asked his father if the heart attack is related to his over-eating of ice-cream. His father was furious and denied it fervently and forbid him to ever mention it again.

John knew that there was something very wrong with their diet thus he set out to research on their diet and found alarming answers to his questions. After all the research he concluded was that **the common diet in his country is:**

1. **the main cause for major health problems, and**
2. **detrimental to the environment.**

He and his wife decided to move away to stay on an island, grew their own food and lived a simple life by



choice with only 500US per annum. He firmly refused to accept any support from funds generated from his father's business. Later, he wrote the book "Diet for a New America" which soon became a bestseller at that time. His book outlines the ethical, environmental and health implications of animal factory farming and dairy-based ice cream being part of the global problem we are facing now. Though his book directly criticized the dairy industry that supported his father's business ironically it saved his father eventually.

According to John, **his father**, Robbins senior, immediately **changed his diet** after reading the book when he was "knocking at death's door" and **ended up living 20 more healthy years.**

Born on October 26, 1947(age 74years), Robbins currently manages the Food Revolution Network that assists others to regain their health via a plant-based life-style and reinforce the health of the planet with his son, Ocean. (age 48years). We should read John's book. It was not easy to get the first edition of the book. However, "Diet for a New America 25th Anniversary Edition: How Your Food Choices Affect Your Health, Your Happiness and the Future of Life on Earth." is available on Amazon in several formats.

You can also learn about his story from YouTube:
Chinese version: https://youtu.be/lp_cmpW_gyw



Why Veganism

English Version: https://youtu.be/x_jH4fUDWqo

We eat to live and there is **a strong relationship between humans and food**, thus the saying: “We are what we eat.” **Great Dharma masters in China had the ancient wisdom that the food we eat is connected to the mind, community and ecology** thus they advocated a vegan diet for the monastics.

Food is now no longer seen as something to satisfy our hunger, taste buds and desires. With rising campaigns on the how food is connected to our health and environment more and more Westerns are going vegan. Whatever their motives or approaches the outcome is the same.



BREATHING: OUR BEST FRIEND



When we are emotionally upset, we lose control and is no longer mindful. Is there a way to overcome it? One easy way is doing breathing exercises or pranayama.



Breathing: Our Best Friend

These days **stress and pressure** have become part and parcel of our lives hence it is common for many to have psychological problems. This perpetual struggle to do things faster and better leads to not only stress but many health problems. When given a task we end up getting nervous, uncontrollably emotional thus losing mindfulness. When we are emotionally upset, we lose control and is no longer mindful. Is there **a way to overcome** it? One easy way is doing **breathing exercises or pranayama**.

Everyone must breathe, if we stop breathing, we will die. When we are very angry or nervous, our breathing is not the same as usual. We will notice that our breathing becomes more rapid. In fact, our breath is our 'best friend'. When we cannot control our emotions and we feel nervous, our breath naturally becomes short and shallow. This is the way, our 'best friend' warns us, not to let the situation affect us, for if we do then, we have failed.

Many people do not know **how to self-reflect when they lose control**, they start to put the blame on the people, around them, situations and other matters but themselves. In fact, we have a choice whether to be influenced or not by these external factors. Hence, when we are out of control, **do**



not blame others, or other external factors. In Buddhism the best way to deal with this is to develop mindfulness.

“What is mindfulness? “ **Mindfulness is to live in the present moment**, not dwelling in the past nor the future. To live in the present moment means not to think about whatever that had happened in the past, nor what would or might happen in future. **Focus instead on the present moment.** How to know whether we are thinking about the past or not? For example, if we had a disagreement with someone and it made us so upset until we were unable to sleep then we are rather silly and we are not being mindful. We had allowed whatever that had happened affected us so much so we could not sleep. This is a good example of dwelling in the past. There are examples of delusions over the “future”, but it would not be discussed here. Why then is breathing our ‘best friend’? It is because **breathing is in the present moment** and most importantly, the very moment we are affected by any incident it will send us a signal. The moment we are nervous it becomes very short and shallow. When we are very angry, we think that the person in front of us is very unreasonable. Children will say (in Hokkien): “I don’t want to be friends with you anymore!”

But now that we have grown up, we are reluctant to say it directly, but think, “I am not with you” When emotions get out of hand, we would even resort to beating up the one we were angry with. After such an incident, some will



Breathing: Our Best Friend

regret— those who feel regret is doing well and can be considered to be a “post- realized” person. One who realized only after reacting to the cause but the realization came a bit late. Some people do not **self-reflect after clashing** with others they sometimes even felt that they should hit harder or scolded more viciously instead. This kind of person could be considered to be a “**non-realized” person**. Thus, **mindfulness helps us** to progress from a “non-realized” to a “post- realized” person. But this is not enough, we should strive **to upgrade ourselves to** become “**a fully realized”** person. **Breath** our ‘best friend’ is always here to **signal us** hence we will know exactly how we are supposed to respond and this potential is called “**fully realized**”. If we are able to develop and acquire this potential then **we will not lose our temper easily**. In other words, if we are always aware of our feelings then we are able to resolve our problems without losing our temper, as we are in control of our emotions.

As Buddhists, we should practise “mindfulness”. It is actually very easy to do so, when we are **aware and pay attention to our breathing**. We will immediately know that we are emotional the moment our breathing becomes short and shallow. Then we can immediately control our emotions by drawing three deep breaths. First, **inhale deeply, then exhale slowly through your nose**.



Repeat this twice, at a slower pace than before. It is important that we are **exhaling slower than** when we are **inhaling**. If we want to relieve stress, then slowly draw a deep breath. For example, if we usually take two seconds to draw a breath then we need to extend the time to at least three seconds. Likewise, we need to **extend the time to exhale**, in this case preferably for five seconds. Remember to **be slow and relax our whole body while exhaling**. Imagine that we are **lying on 'cotton wool'** and that our **whole body is relaxed**. If we use this breathing method then we are able to relieve stress, we would be able to relax and control our emotions.

An important point to note regarding drawing a deep breath is to breathe in through your nose, for three seconds, and exhale for five seconds. Then try to **hold the breath while inhaling and exhaling**, for at least one or two seconds in the process of inhaling and exhaling.

If we are under a lot of pressure and are easily stressed, we tend to lose control of our emotions and **feel like hitting out at someone**. When this happens then we can try to **quickly do the three deep breaths technic**. Gradually, we would be able to **control our emotions** and will not react and give in to the urge to hit out anymore. We should be thankful to our breath, our best friend for its warning.



The wise do not blame external factors nor try to change them. As a wise saying goes: **“a fool wants to change the world, but a wise man changes his mind set.”** The foolish often think that they are right and others are wrong in everything.

When we gather in a group or team, it is unavoidable to encounter conflicts as members have different personality traits. If we are wise, we will not try to change anyone who is not agreeable. It would be difficult if not impossible to change him. So, **instead of trying to change that person we should change ourselves instead.**

Mindfulness practice starts with the conditioning of the body. We begin with regulating our breathing which is the first step to condition the body and eventually adjust our mind set. When we start to understand how to regulate our breathing, we are able adjust our mind set. The second part of the saying: **“a wise man changes his own mind set”**, means that **a mirror is not for us to look at others**, but at ourselves, to see our ugly side. However, a lot of people do not think in this way. When we were young, we used to hear the elders saying : “Ah! lu xi suah lua eh lah!” (in Hokkien) that person always put the blame on others. “Lua” is not found among the list of the hundreds of Chinese Surnames. **The ancients taught us not to blame external factors but to blame ourselves instead.** This is something



we should learn.

The Chinese culture is definitely influenced by Buddhist teachings for instance after understanding “cause and effect”, we tend to talk about “yuan” (in English: affinity), which is the most commonly used word in Chinese.

In fact, the word “yuan” is derived from Buddhist teachings. The most **basic teaching about “yuan”** in Buddhism is found **in the Law of Dependent Origination** (Pratīyasamutpāda (Sanskrit)), the arising and cessation of all dharmas are interdependent. When Śāriputra and Maudgalyayana, were in search of enlightenment, they met Aśvajit. Impressed by Aśvajit’s demeanour, they asked him, who his teacher was. At that time, Aśvajit had attained Arahantship. However, he humbly replied that he was inexperienced. He later said, “My teacher is Sakyamuni Buddha. The Buddha’s teaching is very profound, but I have not attained that level yet. I only know the Law of Cause and Effect taught by the Buddha. It states that **all phenomena arise due to causes or conditions.**”

Later, the Chinese find that the word “condition or affinity” to be very useful. **Everything is related to condition or affinity.** For example, people who share similar conditions or affinity will get together, even though they may be a thousand miles apart, whereas those without



affinity, would not become acquainted even when they meet each other. Therefore, the reason we meet today is definitely due to the cause planted many lifetimes ago. The Chinese said: “To travel together in the same boat requires the affinity of five hundred past lives.” We, are together today due to the affinities formed some 500 past lives. Some affinities are positive while others are negative. If our affinity is positive, we would feel that this person is easy to get along with.

Therefore, we must **adjust and adapt ourselves** instead trying to change others to suit us which is very difficult if not impossible. It is much easier to change ourselves, as it is merely a matter of changing our mind set or attitude towards that particular person. Each person has his own personality thus his action is different from us. So, instead of disliking him, we should be fair and accept his thoughts and actions. Should there be a conflict of personalities we would find him to be difficult to get along with, and vice versa. People with different personalities are as incompatible as that of water and oil. A wiser approach is to learn to **adapt and accept** others. We can be demanding on ourselves, but we cannot do so with others.



FROM SUFFERING TO LIBERATION

If we could gather these three provisions, namely faith, aspiration, and practice, and recite the name of Amitabha Buddha diligently, then rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Amitabha would not be a dream.



From Suffering to Liberation

The **three provisions** or essentials to have as stated in the Sukhavati-vyuha-sutra when opting to **practice Amitabha Buddha Name Recitation** in order to secure rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha are **faith, aspiration, and practice**. These three provisions can be likened to the necessary provisions such as food, drinks etc, that are to be prepared, when going on a journey to a distant land.

The “Amitabha Sutra”, was translated by the Great Master Kumarajiva. In the Tripitaka of Chinese Buddhism, there is another version translated by Master Xuan Zang, entitled “Sutra in Praise of the Pure Land”, the phrase “wholeheartedly without being scattered” as mentioned in “Amitabha Sutra”, was translated by Master Xuan Zang as “fixing the mind without being scattered”. Another is the phrase “their minds will not be inverted”, which Master Xuan Zang, translated as “their minds will not be scattered”.

Another paragraph mentioned “firmly upholds mindfulness of his name, if for one day, or for two days... or for seven days... wholeheartedly without being scattered”, the phrase “wholeheartedly without being scattered” refers to the state of samadhi! Therefore, recitation of the Buddha’s



name calms the scattered mind. Once we developed deeper understanding, we will comprehend the state of concentration. If we develop our concentration further then wisdom arises. Wisdom cannot arise from a scattered mind. This refers to trīśikṣā (“threefold training”) - śīla (morality), samādhi (concentration) and prajñā (wisdom). What is the meaning of samādhi? Samādhi, means concentration or an undistracted mind, this is not easy to achieve. Often, our minds are very distracted, as one thought subsides, another arises. Therefore, one must be patiently, and try to concentrate either by being mindful of the breath or Amitabha Recitation, engaging ourselves into concentration, deep concentration. Then, we could experience prajñā, and prajñā arises from concentration. This the practice of śamatha and vipaśyanā, where śamatha the practise of calming the mind while vipaśyanā is related to ‘seeing the true nature of reality’. If we were to investigate and discuss Pure Land Practice, we should start from the Pure Land sutra. We ought to deepen our study and understand correctly the content of “Amitabha Sutra” (the Shorter Sukhāvāṭīvyūha Sūtra). Another important sutra for those who practise Amitabha Recitation is the “Infinite Life Sutra” (the Longer Sukhāvāṭīvyūha Sūtra).

The important points of the “three levels of rebirth in Pure Land” that are conditioned and accompanied by Bodhicitta. This point is discussed in detail in the last section



of “The Infinite Life Sutra”, you may pay particular attention to this. Another Pure Land sutra entitled “The Visualization Sutra” or “The Sutra of the Visualization of the Buddha of Infinite Life” (the Amitāyurdhyāna Sūtra), which expounds the essence of the sixteen visualizations. These sixteen visualizations are not easy to practise and not everyone can do it. Nevertheless, “The Visualization Sutra” is important. It commences with the “three meritorious deeds” followed by the “sixteen visualizations” and “nine grades of rebirths”. This could help us to fully understand the practice of Amitabha Recitation.

The many methods of cultivation in Buddhism

It is important to **choose the philosophy that is right** for us when practising or studying Buddhism. Currently ICT made it really easy to access information on any topic possible thus we can be familiar with the various Buddhist cultivation or practise methods. Malaysia is unique that in the eyes of Buddhists as we can find various sects of all the three existing traditions. Malaysia used to be the meeting place of the various Buddhist Traditions. Monastics from both the Northern (Mahayana) and Southern (Theravada) traditions converged here.



Many monks migrated from countries in the South to Southeast Asia, from Sri Lanka and Burma to Thailand, Cambodia, and the Malay Peninsula, since the time Ashoka began to spread Buddhism. We can see the society in **Malaysia and Indonesia being greatly influenced by Indian culture** due to this. Sanskrit can be said to be the dominant cultural language from the 10th century to modern times. In fact, we can see that and Thai and Cambodian language are influenced by Sanskrit, we can find many Sanskrit words in Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia.

Buddhist beliefs in this region were later influenced by Mahayana Buddhism in the last two hundred years as a result of its geographical proximity. The Theravada tradition has a direct influence in the northern part of Malaysia, which is adjacent to Thailand. It was only when the Chinese migrated to South East Asia that Chinese Buddhism emerged. At the moment, Chinese Buddhism, consisting primarily of Chinese classics is most influential in this region.

Tibetan Buddhism has been gradually introduced to Malaysia over the last two decades. There are many Tibetan teachers in this country. However, since every transmission appears to be influenced by local folk customs and cultures and some are even based on legendary mythology may have some negative sides.



It is interesting to note that not only the Malaysian society is very diverse, as it is multi-racial, multi-ethnic multi-cultural and multi-religious but Malaysian Buddhism is just as diverse. However, diversity can occasionally cause problems. For example, some individuals may like to study various Dharma disciplines at one go. When they know that a Theravadin Dharma teacher is in town, they will go and study under him. While on another occasion, they will participate in a Seven-Day Amitabha Buddha Name Recitation Retreat here or any centre elsewhere thereafter. Similarly, should a famous Tibetan Rinpoche arrive from India, then they will all flock to attend his pujas and teachings. They, as they try to learn everything at one go, will eventually end up as **“Jack of all trades but master of none.” They who try to learn everything will eventually end up accomplishing nothing.** This way of trying to learn everything is extremely detrimental in the practice of Buddhism.

Focus On One Dharma Practice

To be good Buddhist practitioners we must **choose a Dharma practice that suits our intrinsic nature.** Many failed to achieve their goals because they refuse to diligently follow only one practice. If we do not choose a particular Dharma practice to follow, we would not know where to



start. In order to wholeheartedly follow a particular practice, one must have **a holistic understanding of Buddhism** especially its history and background. It is important to know and understand the evolution of Buddhism, including the reason why there are so many different traditions, sects and teachings today. This will enhance our desire to continue to explore and practise the Dharma practice we have chosen. It would be great to eventually realise our goal by diligently practising the Dharma practice we have chosen.

In any case, we must keep in mind that if we choose the Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection as our practice as it is the best for us, it may not be so for others. Should someone we know, is not practising Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection but is instead practising a particular Buddhist meditation and is progressing well, then, the meditation he is practising is good for him. Similarly, Tantric is the best to someone who practices it. There is no contradiction, nor doubt regarding this. We should **tolerate and respect others** who choose the Dharma practice that is most suitable for them. Tolerance means being tolerant in our practise of the Dharma that suits us and others who choose the Dharma that suits them. It is extremely important to keep in mind that **all Dharma practices are equal**, and that we should respect and tolerate each other.

However, it is indeed sad that we continue to encounter



religious teachers and devotees of different Dharma practices or different traditions, **rejecting and looking down** on others just because their practice is different. This is not a good sign; thus, we need to realise and be aware of it.

Faith

Faith, aspiration, and practice are the three provisions needed should one seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land. In the sutra, **“faith” means to be convinced that there is a Buddha named Amitabha and that the Western Pure Land exists.** The teachings of different traditions have their own views and is different to that of others. For example, Theravadins seek **liberation from rebirth.** They primarily follow the example of the Buddha’s disciples and practised the Four Noble Truths in order to achieve liberation from birth and death. They generally believe that Shakyamuni Buddha could have attained arahantship at the time of the ancient Buddha, but he chose to **practise the Bodhisattva Path,** which took a long time to complete. The Bodhisattva Path, is not for everyone. Liberation from life and death, as well as the exit from the three lower realms, is more significant in Theravada Buddhist countries. However, there are exceptions especially **in Myanmar** where there are **cravings on stones depicting the vows of practising**



the Bodhisattva path by the ancients there.

Imagine how disastrous it would be for an elderly adherent of Chinese Buddhism; who had been diligently practising Buddha Name Recollection be told that there is no Amitabha Buddha or Avalokestivara Bodhisattva. Even though he may not fully believe the statement but his faith would be shaken. Therefore, those who choose to practise Buddha Name Recollection must have absolute or **unshakable faith in the existence of the Buddha** whose name they choose to recite.

To practise Amitabha Buddha Name Recitation or Recollection we must not only believe that Amitabha Buddha and his Western Pure Land exists but also in cause and effect. **A practitioner of another Dharma practice can be a very good Buddhist**, even though he may not believe in the existence of Amitabha Buddha or the other Bodhisattvas. We must admire him as he is able to train his mind and break free from the cycle of birth and death. We admire the noble cause he practises that enables him to attain liberation.

If we do everything according to worldly laws then we will be bound to the six realms. This was made perfectly clear when we discussed the Four Noble Truths. We can be reborn in the of the Western Pure Land if we were to recollect



the name of Amitabha Buddha diligently with absolute faith. This is also **faith or belief in cause and effect**.

Of the three provisions, **“faith” includes self-assurance**. Someone might be doubtful that he would be able to attain rebirth in the Western Pure Land by recollecting the name of Amitabha Buddha. A Malaysian would reply, “Boleh, Memang Boleh.”, which means of course you can do it for sure. As long as you have the three provisions of faith, aspiration and practice, you will definitely be able to be reborn there.

Somebody once asked if I were a tantric practitioner after I had been introducing the sequential stages of practising Buddhism based on “The Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment (Lamrim Chenmo) for six days. Despite being in contact with some excellent Tibetan teachers, I am not a Tantric practitioner and I have chosen to practise Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection. When I was studying in New Zealand, I became very interested in Buddhism. I first learned about Theravada Buddhism, then I met an English teacher who was well-verse in the three traditions of Buddhism. I gained an initial understanding of the overall structure of Buddhism. When I returned to Malaysia, the first teacher I approached was Venerable Zhumo, a well-known and well-respected senior monk in the Malaysian Buddhist community. I attended weekends Amitabha Buddha Name



Recollection pujas at The Buddhist Triple Wisdom Hall with my high school classmate, Brother Leong Kok Hing. Our affinity to Buddhism is different. At that time, he was very active in the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia. The Most Venerable Zhumo was a compassionate monk who cared deeply for the younger generation and gave us a lot of encouragement. He always urged us to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha whenever we visited him. In fact, prior to his departure, Venerable Zhumo ask everyone to primarily perform Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection when he departs. The Most Venerable Zhumo was an excellent monk who is well-versed in preaching Buddhism. I started studying Buddhism late. I took refuge in the Triple Gem and received the Five Lay Precepts at The Buddhist Triple Wisdom Hall, and I ordained under Venerable Master Xiu Jing.

Many may not be familiar with Venerable Master Xiu Jing, my ordination teacher. He stayed in Penang Hill and became a master in teaching the four Brahma Viharas. When we visited him during his old age, we asked him about the practice of Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection. He said, “**Namo Amitufo**” is “**a great name carrying immeasurable virtue**”, and he too advised people to practise Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection. Venerable Master Bo Yuan, my Chan Dharma lineage teacher, was talented in calligraphy and painting. Many of the couplets



in Than Hsiang Temple are his works of art. He was an enlightened Chan Master, he liked to tell a real story that happened at the Gushan Yongquan Temple regarding the rebirth of Venerable Master Huilai's in the Western Pure Land. We enjoyed being close to him thus whenever we were in Kuala Lumpur, we would visit him. Every time we visited; he would advised everyone present to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha. Even though Venerable Master Bo Yuan was a Chan master, an enlightened Chan master, yet he would earnestly advised us to recollect the name of Amithbha Buddha.

I have been in contact with a few great Tibetan Buddhist masters. They had conduct numerous Dharma teachings using the facilities at Than Hsiang Temple. I would like to tell you about an interesting meeting that I had with a Tibetan lineage head of a smaller sect, which is known for their "Powa practice." I asked him if the Powa meditation would be of help to the residents of our senior citizens' homes. I told him that the senior residents are practising the Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection daily. He told us to teach the residents to recite the name of Amitabha Buddha wholeheartedly. He said that he also taught his mother to **recite Amitabha Buddha, and that the rest is unnecessary.**

Chinese Buddhism is unique in such a way that some



masters are Chan as well as Pure Land masters. Why do these **Chan masters also teach the Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection?** You may contemplate on it thoroughly. When we say that the practice of Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection is universal, we mean that it can be practised by great bodhisattvas like Manjushri and Samanthabhadra as well as an illiterate old lady.

Today, in order to strengthen our faith in the practice of Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection let us share and motivate each other with actual examples of late great masters who took rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Amitabha Buddha.

The 13th Patriarch of the Pure Land Tradition, Great Master Yin Guang **predicted the date and time of his departure** to take rebirth in Amitabha Pure Land. Master Yin Guang wrote a letter in response to some of his followers' questions in the spring of his 80th birthday, he hinted that he would be leaving. "I am now eighty years old, and I am in a precarious position," he stated. He also stated, "I'll be gone. How can we continue to follow this uncertainty of life and death?"

Master Yin Guang felt unwell at the end of the tenth lunar month in 1940, so he appointed the monk Miao Zhen to be the abbot of the Ling Yan Shan Temple. Everyone was



glad that he had chosen Venerable Miao Zhen to succeed him as abbot, and they began to make arrangements for the ceremony. They selected the ninth day of the eleventh lunar month, but Master Yin Guang said it will be too late. Everyone wanted to bring forward the ceremony to the fourth of the month, but he shook his head and said it is still too late. Finally, it was suggested that the ceremony be held on the first day of the eleventh lunar month, and he nodded his head this time. Venerable Miao Zhen took over as abbot of Ling Yan San Temple on the first day of the eleventh lunar month.

On the fourth day of the eleventh lunar month, Master Yin Guang became ill. He got out of bed at 1:30 a.m. and said, **“Recite Amitabha, see Amitabha, will surely take rebirth in the Western Pure Land”** After saying that, he recited Amitabha loudly. He stood up at 2:15 a.m., washed his hands, and said, “Thanks to Amitabha’s guidance, I’ll be leaving now. **Everyone must practice Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection, make your vow to take rebirth in the Western Pure Land.**” After saying that, he drew up a chair and sat upright facing west. Around 3:00 a.m., Venerable Miao Zhen paid respect to Master Yin Guang. Master Yin Guang advised him to maintain the temple and continue the Pure Land teaching in a humble manner, and not to be extravagant. Then without saying another word, recited the name of Amitabha Buddha with lips moving



slightly. At about 5:00 a.m., Master Yin Guang passed away peacefully surrounded by the chants of Amitabha Buddha. So, the reason why the great master said that the ninth and fourth day of the eleventh lunar month were too late was because he had a premonition of his demise. Venerable Hui Lai also did the same. This is an excellent example of the power or the accomplishment of Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection.

Many may think that these were Venerable Masters thus they could achieve it. In fact, even lay Buddhists can be reborn in the Western Pure Land. Such an example happened in Wan Ching Yuen. Wong Kim Kee, an elderly male resident diligently followed the recitation of Amitabha Buddha during the morning service at 5:30 a.m. daily. He was later diagnosed with cancer, but he continued to recite the Buddha's name with great conviction, which is truly commendable. When his condition deteriorated his children arranged for him to be hospitalised. When he saw his children in tears, he would console them and ask them to assist him in reciting Amitabha Buddha. On one Wednesday he suddenly said, "I'm leaving in three days' time." When his children heard that, they did not believe him and thought that he was rambling because he was ill and confused. His condition suddenly improved, Venerable Zhen Xin and the director of Wan Ching Yuen paid him a visit on Saturday morning. They informed me that Elder Wong's condition



had improved. Unexpectedly, his daughter called around 1:00 p.m. to inform us that her father had passed away. The nurses, were taken aback by **Wong's peaceful death** as they had witnessed many cancer patients under their care die with great difficulty. Not understanding Buddhism, the nurses thought that the old man must have chanted many sutras throughout his life. However, he **simply recited "Namo Amitabha" diligently.**

Aspiration

Aspiration includes **aspiring for rebirth in the Western Pure Land and developing Bodhicitta.** One starts with renouncing this defiled Buddhaland of Sakyamuni Buddha to seek rebirth in the Western Pure Land and to **return to help sentient beings** in this Buddhaland later.

This is like going to study in a good university in the United States. A university that is well equipped physically, with very good professors and course mates making it a place conducive for studies. After completing our studies, we will not forget to return to Malaysia to serve the people of our motherland. Thus, vowing to go to the Western Pure Land is, just like going abroad to study. Not only is the environment there very conducive for cultivation but we have **Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva and**



Mahāsthāmaprāpta Bodhisattva as our companions, so we would surely succeed and will have the conditions to return to this impure Buddhaland to save sentient beings. Should we fail to accomplish anything with such conditions and companions then we could only blame ourselves for not studying seriously.

Great Master Ouyi another patriarch of the Pure Land sect, stated that “**The eligibility to take rebirth in the Western Pure Land depends on one’s conviction and sincere aspiration.**” in his “Essential Explanation of Amitabha Sutra.”

Practice

There are various ways to recollect the Buddha. One way, as mentioned in the Eight Precepts is the recollection of the virtues of the Buddha. In the Pure Land school, recollection of the Buddha entails recollecting the true nature of the Buddha, recollecting by mindfully concentrating on an image of the Buddha and recollecting the inconceivable virtues of the Buddha and his names. Nowadays, many practise recollection by recitation of the Buddha’s name. It is mentioned in the ‘Amitabha Sutra’ that, “If there is a good man or a good woman who hears the name of Amitabha Buddha and firmly upholds mindfulness of his name, be it for one day, or for two days ... or for seven



days, wholeheartedly without being distracted, then when these people approach life's end, Amitabha Buddha, with many of his noble assembly, will appear before them. "When their lives come to an end, their minds will not be inverted, and they will be reborn in Amitabha Buddha's Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss". Therefore, during these 7 days, we will diligently uphold and recite the name of Amitabha Buddha and we call this "the practice of Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection".

The 9th Patriarch of Pure Land Tradition, the Great Master Ouyi, stated that "The eligibility to take rebirth in the Western Pure Land depends on one's conviction and sincere aspiration." in his "Essential Explanation of Amitabha Sutra." whereby the grade of the rebirth will entirely depend on our efforts. In fact, the aim of participating in the Seven-Day Amitabha Recitation Retreat, is to accomplish the undisturbed "one-pointedness" mindfulness within the targeted period. However, this is no easy task. Look around us, there are so many Amitabha Buddha Name Recollection practitioners, but only a few accomplished rebirths in the Western Pure Land.

To summarise, if we could gather these three provisions, namely faith, aspiration, and practice, and recite the name of Amitabha Buddha diligently, then rebirth in the Western Pure Land of Amitabha would not be a dream.

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